

Still Falling For You by kittenCorrosion

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Childhood Sweethearts, F/M, Fluff, Happily Ever After, Mileven, OT3 background, Twelve Years Later, Young Adults, and a wedding fic, gawwwd i just want them to have a happy ending they deserve it, guess what it was inspired by a song what a surprise, honestly it's so fluffy you could choke on it, it's more fluff than angst, jopper background, proposal fic

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Summary:

"It took us a while
'Cause we were young and unsure
With love on the line
What if we both would need more
But all your flaws and scars are mine
Still falling for you"

It's been twelve years since they found each other for the first time. Twelve years of finding each other over and over, because in the end they were always meant to be together.

1. All Your Flaws And Scars Are Mine

Notes for the Chapter:

i started this thing like a month ago and lost steam. then i lost steam on my other story so i finished this one. funny how that goes. heavily inspired by "still falling for you" by ellie goulding.

first chapter is the proposal. second one is the wedding... or mostly the stuff leading up to it. i just finished that chapter so i'm gonna edit it tomorrow and hopefully post it! i just need to be awake to do it and i am very tired atm.

i'm unable to update Miles from Nowhere because my editor is out of town and i nEED him, so this is kind of a consolation story to make up for that.

you guys, this so fluffy i almost died and i'm the one who wrote it. shout out to lara for writing such a beautiful wedding fic and encouraging me to write my own anyways. <3

May 1996

The lightning that flashed was an incandescent purple, lighting up the entirety of the tiny house right as the power went out, plunging everything into darkness in the next breath. Thunder crackled, shaking the windowpanes as it boomed across the sky.

“Mike?”

El's voice rang through darkened living room as she stumbled out of the hallway, blinking as another bolt of lightning briefly lit up the space in front of her. It was enough for her to capture a glimpse of her boyfriend, who was sitting on the couch, still staring in shock at the now-blank TV in front of him. At the sound of her semi-panicked

voice he jumped up, bashing his shin on the already beat-up coffee table.

“Ouch, shit!” he blurted, rubbing at the lump already starting to rise on his leg, “remind me again why we needed another obstacle in this tiny apartment?”

It wasn’t actually an apartment, but that’s what they called it since they were only renting. It was a minuscule, original farmhouse from the 1800s, a leftover relic from when most of Hawkins was nothing but fields of corn and soybeans. It had two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a decent sized living/dining room and kitchen. It was small, decorated with furniture they’d inherited from Hopper’s old place, the “dining” table surrounded by four mismatched chairs. It was what her receptionist and his substitute teacher wages could afford, and as much as Mike complained about the crappy wiring that would zap their fingertips through the sockets and the plumbing that clogged every other week, he wouldn’t have given it up for anything. Because it meant they could be together.

Mike’s complaint made El giggle, her laughter cut short as more thunder rattled the house and she winced. He noticed, of course, and quickly went to her, wrapping her in a hug that smothered her fear in an instant.

For a moment they just stood there, breathing each other in.

“Should I get the candles?” He broke the silence.

“Yes, please,” she answered, voice muffled into his shirt.

They broke apart and headed for the kitchen, digging out the dozen or so candles they now kept in a drawer. This wasn’t the first time the power went out, in the seven months they’d been living there it had happened at least a half a dozen times. El found the matches and they headed back to the living room, setting the candles out and lighting them, filling the room with warm, cozy light. The storm still raged on, rain pounding the windows and making the world outside seem blurry and vague. Mike plopped back onto the couch with a sigh.

"There was new episode of X-files on right before it cut out..." he glanced at the now-quiet television set with barely hidden longing.

El wrinkled her nose at him. "You weren't writing your paper?"

He'd graduated with his Science Education degree and was currently working on a Masters so he could teach high school. The end goal was a doctorate and a job as a physics professor teaching at university, something El knew he was brilliant enough to do. If he studied and finished his research.

"Well, I mean, I *was* writing," he gestured sheepishly to the reference books and highlighters scattered across the coffee table, "I was just... taking a break."

She rolled her eyes with a smile, settling down next to him on the couch and tucking herself into his side as he wrapped an arm around her and pulled her in close. Another round of thunder crashed and she startled at the sound, heart speeding up. Mike looked at her from the side of his eyes.

"We could get you ear plugs, you know."

"No..." she shook her head, "I like storms."

"But they scare you... literally every time."

El pulled back so she could look him in the face, still shaking her head.

"They do but... it's scary but exciting," she bit her lip, "and... they remind me of when I met you. It's a good scary." She shrugged, hoping she was making sense.

A bit of scarlet was creeping up Mike's throat, even after all the years she could still make him flush. He smiled at her fondly, holding in a chuckle at her oxymoron of an explanation.

"So... you like them because they scare you? Last time I scared you you almost beat my face in with the hairdryer..." he raised an eyebrow, "and it was an accidental scare! I thought you heard me come in."

El rolled her eyes. She poked him in the side, where she knew he was ticklish, and scowled playfully.

“That’s a bad scary!” The storm crescendoed again, thunder vibrating the windows and she flinched towards him, stomach shivering. “This is... good scary. Like... when we moved here.”

Mike remembered that day well. It had been November, the first chills of winter starting to whisper through the trees. Both of their families had helped, Hop hauling his old furniture in the back of his Blazer, Joyce and Karen both bringing curtains and kitchen supplies. The boys had been there too, Dustin and Lucas arguing over the best way to fit the mattress down the hallway, Will quietly handing over some canvases he’d painted as a housewarming gift. Despite the bustle of it all, he’d felt that shivery excitement that bordered on fear. Not because he was afraid of moving out of his parent’s or moving in with the love of his life. He’d never made such a confident decision before in his life. But that idea of change, of something different and new, had bubbled up into his stomach in a nervous excitement.

“Okay, I get it,” he reached for her hand to give it a squeeze, “thunderstorms are good scary.” He remembered what she’d mentioned briefly before, “Like the night we met.”

“That was mostly bad scary. Until you guys found me.”

“Really?”

“Mmhm,” she paused but decided to continue, “they’d killed Benny and... I couldn’t stop running.”

Mike wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer, into his lap, knowing the memories were hard to deal with but also knowing it was important for her to talk them out when they resurfaced.

“I was scared to come with you too. But... it was good scary,” she rested her head on her shoulder, settling her waist almost on him, legs in his lap, “that’s why I trusted you. That and the jacket.”

“The jacket?”

“You gave me yours. It was big and warm.”

His arms came up around her waist, holding her tightly to him. He remembered that night well. It had been an automatic reaction, once he had broken out of his shocked staring, he'd immediately approached her, asking if she was okay. She'd been too afraid to say anything, simply shaking her head and shivering violently and within moments the jacket was in his hands, being draped across her shoulders.

“You trusted me because of a jacket?” He couldn't keep the incredulous edge out of his voice and she scrunched her face up again.

“No, the jacket helped,” she rested her head on his shoulder, shifting as something squarish dug into the back of her thigh, “I didn't want to come. Because they would come and kill you too. But you kept saying, ‘Are you lost? We can help!’ and smiling,” she shifted again, “even though Lucas looked really mad.”

Mike snorted. “Lucas almost always looked mad. He was pretty pissed I took you home instead of staying out and looking for Will,” he felt her shifting and tried to scoot her out of his lap a bit, “but what was I supposed to do, leave you out in the freezing rain because you weren't the person we were looking for?”

“You could have,” he gave her an outraged look and she quickly pecked him on the cheek to soothe him, “but you didn't. Because you're good.”

That had been the common theme El returned to. She had seen his innate goodness from the beginning, the willingness to help a stranger, to risk everything for the sake of a friend. Even in the simple act of passing a jacket over to a soaked, scared girl. Not because he would get something out of it or have something to brag about, but simply because it was the right thing to do. It had gotten him in trouble more than once, when the cautious justice that usually steered him, aka Lucas, was missing. But the goodness ruled his life and it kept the abandoned boxes of kittens coming and the days spent laboring in the yard of their old neighbor Mrs. Gillespie from ending.

El loved it.

“Well, hey, I’m just lucky that you decided that was enough, otherwise who knows where we might have ended up,” he pressed his face against her collarbone and trailed a few kisses up to her chin. She shifted again and whatever had been digging into her thigh started digging into her hip. Frowning she scooted out his arms and looked down at his lap, eyebrow raised.

“Is there something in your pocket?”

His face went slack, shoulders rigid and he stuttered out, “Uh, n-no.”

He was lying and she knew it.

It took her all of two seconds to dive, and he saw her coming, jumping out of her reach and dancing a few steps back as she swore and giggled and pounced again.

“W-woah woah, wait,” he backed up a few more steps, hands up, “El, hang on just—” he yelped as she dove, hands swatting at the lumpy pocket, “just wait a second, WAIT A SECOND.”

The serious tone and volume of his voice froze her in her tracks, the playful smile sliding off her face as sudden anxiety filled her chest, constricting her lungs. She’d done something wrong. Mike noticed and sighed, deflating and coming towards her, reaching for his pocket.

“You’re fine, El, you didn’t do anything wrong just...” he quickly reassured her, knowing the familiar look of anguish on her face. The mystery object was in his hand now, still hidden from view, “I just... this wasn’t how I planned on doing it...”

He held the minuscule box out, into the dim light so she could see it, and then took a few steps towards her, one hand reaching out. She grasped his hand with hers, staring down at the tiny mystery.

“What is it?”

Dropping to one knee he looked up at her and smiled, expecting some sort of joyful reaction. Instead she looked even more confused and

before he could flick open the box and explain what was going on, she interrupted him, eyes nervously looking around.

“What are you doing?” she gripped his hand tighter, voice unsure, “Mike?”

Mike deflated.

“Dammit, El, I’m *trying* to propose, if you would let me!” the words spilled from his lips and he immediately blanched. *Real romantic, Wheeler.*

“Propose *what?* ” her eyes flew even wider, “wait, you mean like *marriage* propose?”

The societal aspect of it was lost on her, the getting on one knee, the small box. Plenty of her high school friends had already been engaged, showing off their giant diamonds with wide smiles. But she’d never seen a proposal actually happen, Hop had proposed to Joyce while they were out at a romantic dinner and she’d missed it. She didn’t know that this was what it was “supposed” to be like, but somehow she hadn’t imagined that this was it.

“I mean, that’s kind of what I was hoping?” He seemed confused at her reaction, this particular scenario not one he’d ever imagined. He had assumed she’d be happy. “Unless, um, you don’t want to, I just thought...”

She was still frozen in place, staring at him with gigantic, unreadable eyes, hands covering her mouth. Unsure what else to do, he stood up and walked closer, opening the box to show her what he meant.

Inside was simple golden band, the tiniest chips of diamond standing out across it like a constellation. It was meager, but the tiny sparkling pieces caught the warm candlelight, twinkling in the box like a starry night sky. She gasped and looked up at him.

“You want to *marry* me?” her voice was a squeak, but he detected an edge of panic.

His heart dropped.

“Well, um, yeah...” he took a step towards her, his palms suddenly sweaty, “is... is that okay?”

She shook her head and backed up, away from him, looking like a frightened animal, eyes wide like a deer caught in the headlights. Mike felt all of the oxygen leave the room, fear choking his throat as the future he'd imagined for them crumbled into dust. He shut the box, shoving it back into his pocket, reaching out to her with shaking hands, trying to fix whatever he'd just broken, suddenly desperate. Had he asked too much? Had he just lost her?

“El, I’m sorry, it’s too much, I-I shouldn’t have—” he literally choked on his words as she shied away from his outstretched arms. She hadn’t done that in years and as he stared at her, heart shattering, he saw the tears that filled her eyes and poured down her cheeks. Her mouth was open, like she was trying to say something but the words wouldn’t come. He needed her to speak. “P-Please say something, I... I don’t know...”

He was crying now too, their matching tears dripping onto the carpet. El inhaled deeply, like her entire being was breaking before managing to shove the words out.

“Y-You c-c-can’t,” she was shaking her head again, almost hysterical, one hand gripping at her heart, “that’s f-f-fuh—” She had to pause and take another deep breath before blurting out the word stuck in her throat. “*Forever.*”

Mike furrowed his brows, trying to understand what she meant and she desperately pushed out the rest.

“You c-can’t want me f-forever,” the hysteria quickly turned to misery as she looked down at her palms, scarred with half-moons from the years of clenched fists and sharp nails, “I’m *broken*,” she dared to look him in the eyes, “you can’t want that *forever*. Marriage is forever. You deserve better than that,” her voice turned bitter as she choked out her fear, “better than *me*.”

Her words washed over him like cold rain and the confusion and pain that clouded his face morphed into outrage. The fear turned into anger and bubbled over, making him shake.

“You... you think I’m going to stop *wanting* you?!” his voice filled the small house, “just because you have some *baggage*?”

He’d never been this angry, not at her and the unfamiliar emotion made her freeze as he lifted his hands in air.

“You think I spent months dreaming about you after you disappeared because you didn’t mean anything?! Do you actually believe that everything between us is just temporary because you were *abused*?! That I’ve spent the last *twelve years* loving you just to *throw you out like garbage*?!” He crescendoed and paused to take a deep breath, hurt breaking his voice down to a whisper. “Do you really think I would do that you?”

El’s mouth was gaping, but she swallowed her tears, suddenly feeling ashamed. He was Mike. He was *good*. And she’d let her fear convince her otherwise.

“No,” she shook her head, voice small, “I’m s-sorry.”

But he wasn’t done. Her insecurity had opened his own and now the fears he’d kept silent for so long poured out.

“God, El, if anything you should leave me.” She frowned but he didn’t notice, staring at the flame of a flickering candle. “Do you understand how... how *amazing* you are? You love with every fiber of your being, you sacrifice everything you are just to help others. You’ve saved my life more than once and...” he was choking again, overcome with emotions, “and I’ll never understand why you chose *me*.”

“Mike...” she reached out, eyes now soft, wrapping her small hand around his.

“I’m just... I’m some loser nerd from the Midwest,” El looked like she wanted to protest but he kept going, “I’ve never seen the ocean, I’ve only been out of the state a dozen times, I’m not... I’m not cool or exciting or anything that you deserve. And every single day I wonder how is it that I’m lucky enough to wake up next to you, how lucky I am that you *want* to stay next to me. I don’t understand it, I can’t.” His body shook with emotion. “I can’t stop being afraid that I’m

being selfish by keeping you near me when you deserve so much *more.*"

There was silence as his revelation hung heavy in the air between them. Her hand was still holding his and she took a step towards him, trying to get him to meet her eyes. Her free hand reached up, gently cupping his cheek and tilting his face towards hers.

"Mike." Her eyes were red and she had snot under her nose but he still couldn't help thinking about how beautiful she was and she blinked up at him. "You... you're *home*. I don't need more than that," she breathed out, "I *love* you. You are enough. Okay?"

Her words were exactly what he'd needed to hear. He collapsed onto her, head sagging onto her shoulder as she held him, burying his face into her neck and breathing her in.

"Promise?" he croaked out, voice muffled in her hair.

Usually she was the one that needed the special word, the one that silenced doubts between them, the one that had bound them together through all the years. El pressed herself against him, nuzzling the side of his face with her nose.

"I promise," she paused, staying close but moving her mouth far enough away so she knew he could hear her, "and... I'm sorry. I know you wouldn't throw me away," she shivered despite herself, "I just get scared. Bad scared."

"I know you do, El," he regained his voice, pulling back to look into her eyes, "I've known that since I met you. I know you're..." he didn't like using the word but did, "...broken. But that doesn't make me love you any less. All your flaws, all your fears, all your scars..." He reached for her hand, rubbing his thumb across the scarred palms. "They're mine too. I promised to always be there for you, to help you pick up the pieces when you break. I meant it."

She was staring up into his eyes, any trace of fear now gone. "I know... I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too. I shouldn't... I shouldn't have yelled at you," he

pressed a kiss to her temple as another apology, "I just didn't want to believe that you really thought I would... abandon you."

"I know," she whispered again.

"I mean, when we moved in here together, I kinda thought... I mean I had hoped, that maybe you had realized I was serious about..." He paused to pick the right word. "About *forever*. With you."

"It wasn't you, Mike," she bit her lip, finally able to find the words, "I know you're serious. But I was scared. I let my fear hurt you. I'm sorry."

He pulled her to him again, pressing his nose into her hair and feeling her warm breath on his chest. It was enough. Enough to know she was still there in his arms, smelling like her favorite floral perfume and freshly-washed sheets as she squeezed his ribcage and buried her face further into his sweatshirt. He told her the same thing he always did when she tried to apologize for something that made her afraid.

"You never have to apologize to me, El." He rested his chin on the top of her head. "I forgave you for everything you could ever do a long time ago."

There was a pause as she snuffled against his chest.

"When was that?" she asked.

"Hm?"

"When did you forgive me?"

"Twelve years ago. When I realized I loved you. When I realized you might make mistakes that hurt me—" she almost looked offended but he quickly explained, "not because you wanted to, but because you had fears that were real. Fears that made you make mistakes." He held her even tighter, nearly squeezing the breath out of her. "Fears that aren't your fault. They came from the same place you did, but you've always been stronger, El. Like now. How could I not forgive you when I already knew?"

She looked up at him with such love and desperation it nearly took his breath away and he leaned his head down and kissed her.

Their journey hadn't been an easy one. There had been miscommunications and situations that had torn them apart, hurtful words thrown and unintended anger, but in the end they always came back to each other, as if their stories were meant to be written together. Even at young age, sitting in empty, middle school cafeteria, it had been there. Later, in a high school gymnasium, swaying to a slow song under twinkling lights, it had been there. Years later it weighed heavy again as they struggled through long distance, late-night whispers into telephones and falling asleep to the sound of the dial tone. Every struggle and tear-stained pillow. It didn't have a name, it was more a feeling. Something that kept them coming back to one another.

It was an undeniable truth that they were meant for each other. Even other dimensions and otherworldly forces and literal monsters hadn't been able to pull them apart. And it surrounded them again now, as broken pieces reformed and hearts beat together in harmony.

Mike pulled away, grabbed her hand and stepped back, spinning her into a spontaneous twirl before pulling her back to him and beginning to sway.

There was no music, just the sound of the pouring rain and the now-distant thunder, but they didn't need it, enveloping each other in the warmth that now surrounded them as they slow-danced to an invisible band. El looked up at him.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Um... yes," she whispered, her eyes glowing.

He paused, unsure of what she meant and she almost laughed at the look of boyish confusion that crossed his face. A sly grin lit up her face and then she flung herself at him rather suddenly, causing both of them to fall onto the couch, her landing on top of him. He grunted, caught off guard, and bounced onto the cushions, blinking in surprise

as she covered his face in kisses.

"Wait, back up," he said and she paused, still crouched over him, beaming. "Yes to... what?" His eyes suddenly brightened with excited clarity. "Do you mean yes to getting married?"

She nodded, grinning, but then frowned as his brows furrowed into disappointed lines. Was he changing his mind now? He was almost pouting as he looked up at her.

"...but you didn't let me ask."

El almost laughed again, settling for a broad smile instead.

"Ask me."

Her voice was sure, eyes bright. Excitement started to pound in his veins and he sat up, reaching down to tug the little box out his pocket again and open it. Holding the ring up to her, he swallowed, feeling weirdly nervous all over again. Adoration was shining her eyes and he felt the anxiety melt away at the surety that glowed from her hazel-browns.

She loves me.

It was a reassurance, not a question.

"El," he was strangely breathless as he let the long-awaited words slip out. "Will you marry me?"

There was a second of silence and then that smile he loved so much lit up her face again. The candlelight reflected in her eyes, making her seem even warmer as she leaned down to press a kiss to lips. He set his hands on her waist as she deepened it, meeting her fervor with a fiery intensity that left them both breathless. He felt her smiling against him lips and then she pulled back, looking him in the eye.

"Yes."

He tugged the ring out of the box and gently slid it onto her finger as she gazed down at, admiring the way it sparkled.

"Pretty," she smiled.

He pulled her lips down to his again, trying to explain without words just how much she meant to him. She replied by pulling back and planting small kisses up his jaw to his cheekbones, peppering his face with kisses as if she wanted to kiss each and every freckle on his face. He wrapped his arm around her waist, the other coming up to pull her head closer to his, the fire between them growing with each kiss.

"Mike," she gasped between kisses, "tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" He was too preoccupied to really pay attention. "Tomorrow what?"

"We can get married. Tomorrow."

He pulled back and blinked at her.

"Wait... what?"

Her eyes were sparkling.

"I want to marry you. Tomorrow."

"You don't want like a... a big wedding or anything?" He seemed surprised. "I mean, we don't need one I just thought..."

"I don't need a wedding. Just you."

He sat up and she scooted off of him as he took her hand, squeezing it tightly, feeling like his heart could burst.

"If that's what you want..." he looked contemplative, "we could just... go to the courthouse. That's still a thing, I think." He frowned suddenly. "My mom will kill me if I don't tell her first though..."

El nodded suddenly, brows furrowing. "Joyce and Hop too."

"Why don't we tell our parents in the morning? And then get married in the afternoon." He pressed a kiss to her temple as his heart beat even faster at the reality of her words.

“Yes,” she breathed back, face nuzzled into his neck. “Perfect.”

She wants to marry me.

Notes for the Chapter:

idk why this was so angsty, but somehow i still feel like there would be fears and stuff that would keep them from being able to just enjoy such a happy moment. i'm still not sure.

tell me what you thought, if you want. i love your input.

-g

2. Your Heart Got A Story With Mine

Notes for the Chapter:

i want to get married so bad now haha. i have four weddings to go to still this summer and THREE of my friends got engaged in the past three months. i have no chill, i just love happy people in love so much. maybe that's part why i finished this hA.

i threw a jennifer hayes cameo in because i have a weird love for her and i like making her a nice character since she ends up a villain sometimes idk.

this chapter is less angst more fluff and a little slice-of-life. hope you think it's as cute as i do.

It turned out that getting married wasn't as simple as skipping down to the courthouse and saying "I do". After telling Joyce and Hopper first thing the next morning, Hop had let them know that in order to get officially married in the state they needed a marriage license first, which would take about a day to apply for and receive. They'd scheduled an appointment at the courthouse with the justice of the peace too, for the next day to actually have the ceremony, and then all four had headed over the Wheeler residence to inform Karen, since Ted was on a business trip.

Though initially displeased at the prospect of not being allowed to plan a big, elaborate wedding, she quickly burst into happy tears and hugged her son and then El, whispering in her ear that even though she'd always considered her a daughter, she was happy that it would be official.

And then the two mothers had kidnapped El and disappeared out the door, driving her to the nearest wedding boutique to get her a dress, leaving a rather stunned Mike behind. Hopper had slapped him on the shoulder with a chuckle and said, "I would stay out of it if I were you, kid" before telling him to head home and get the documents needed to apply for the license.

El had protested the entire drive that she had plenty of dresses, but it fell on deaf ears as Joyce and Karen discussed lace versus satin and the what neckline would be best. By the time they'd arrived, El was feeling uncomfortable, which only intensified as they put her into dress after dress. Most of them were too heavy, with swathes of thick, white lace embroidery covering everything, itchy sleeves and long satin trains. They were stuffy and suffocating and her distress soon became apparent to the attendant helping her change, a young woman about her age named Jennifer.

At the sight of her client's unhappy face she'd silently changed tactics, removing the heavy, white dresses and bringing something in that was drastically different.

When El walked out for the final time, both the mothers had let out loud gasps. The dress was a soft blush color, the pink tint so subtle it was almost unnoticeable, but it stood out from the other pasty white dresses. It was shorter too, with a flowy, knee-length skirt that was covered in a light layer of frothy lace. The bodice still had embroidery, but less thick, the a-line cut accentuating her small frame without overpowering her. The sleeves fell around her shoulders and rested against the tops of her arms, which showed off her collarbones and high neck, the overall effect simply breathtaking. And it fit perfectly without alterations.

The wide smile on her face had told them that it was the one and almost immediately Joyce burst into tears. She stood up and walked to her adopted daughter, pulling her into a tight hug.

"You're so beautiful, Baby," she said as she cried, and El felt tears well up in her own eyes as she hugged her back.

"Thank you," she paused and took a breath, "Mom."

She'd always called her Joyce, hesitant of infringing too much on the tight-knit Byers family relationship that Joyce had with her boys. But she was so grateful to have had such a strong, loving, maternal presence in her life that it just felt right at the moment. Joyce held her tighter, appreciating the word more than El would ever understand. They held each other for a moment longer before El let go to wipe at her wet face and smile at her mother.

Jennifer appeared next to them holding a box of tissues.

“Were you wanting a veil too?”

El had seen movies with brides wearing long white veils that trailed behind them as they walked down the aisle, but she shook her head, nose wrinkled up. She reached up and tugged at a strand of her curly hair.

“Do I need one?”

“Well... it’s kind of ceremonial...” Karen started to explain, but she noticed El’s unimpressed expression and decided it wasn’t worth it. “But if you don’t want one you don’t need one, honey.”

“I don’t want to be covered,” El explained, fingers playing with the skirt of the dress, “I want to see Mike.”

That had settled it and they headed for the register. Both Joyce and El gaped at the price tag, but Karen whipped out her checkbook before they could protest, quickly scribbling out the amount. El tried to tell her she would pay her back, the cost was several months of her meager receptionist salary, but Karen wouldn’t hear it.

“It’s a wedding gift,” she’d said, “and a thank you, for making my boy the happiest man in the world.”

They headed back to the Wheeler’s, where Mike was waiting with the car and all of their paperwork to apply for the marriage license. He kept asking her questions on the drive over about where they’d taken her but she just smiled and told him he’d see tomorrow.

“Hey, so... I kind of told the guys.”

“All of them?”

“Yeah, I mean, I thought they’d want to know and well... Lucas is hopping a red eye tonight in Orlando so he can make it in time tomorrow, um,” she looked surprised, “and Dustin said he was going to drive out from Indianapolis after work and stay the night. They kind of both think they’re going to be best man even though I told them we were just going to the courthouse...”

“Best man?”

“Yeah, uh, like the guy who’s supposed to hold the rings and stuff. Usually it’s a good friend or family member.”

“Oh... can’t they both be your best man?”

Mike blinked, like the thought hadn’t occurred to him. “I mean, I guess so. Actually... yeah, why not?”

“And then Will can be my best man, and we’ll have all of them.”

She nodded in approval at her idea and looked so proud of herself that Mike felt bad spoiling it.

“Um, well usually the bride has a maid of honor...” he turned into the parking lot of the courthouse, “like, you know, a girl.”

“Oh... I can’t have a best man too?”

She didn’t have any really close female friends, or at least none that she really wanted at the wedding. The only person she could think of was Nancy, but she and Steve and Jonathan were currently on road trip through the south, celebrating her recent promotion to Director of Nursing at the Bronx-Lebanon Hospital in NYC, where they lived. Holly was currently at summer camp, so she was no too, and El couldn’t think of anyone else.

She’d rather have Will, her brother and best friend, the only one who knew her as well as Mike did. They’d fought through the Upside Down and shared nightmares together and she couldn’t think of anyone else she’d rather have at her side while she married her favorite person in the world.

“Well, if that’s what you’d rather have then...” he parked the car and turned to her, “I don’t see why not. You’ll have to call him and ask, I just told him we were getting married... he didn’t *expect* to be my best man unlike the other two.” He rolled his eyes.

“He’ll do it,” she knew her brother wouldn’t say no, “I’ll call afterwards.”

They headed into the mostly empty clerk's office, quickly speeding through the process and signing the dotted lines. The older woman smiled at them and told them the official certificate would be notarized that evening and ready for pick up the next day before they went to the justice of the peace.

El stared at the piece of paper, reaching out and running her fingers over the ink inscription that had her new name. It made everything so... real.

She'd had more names in her life than the average person. Jane, Eleven, El. She remembered the day the adoption papers had gone through and she'd officially become a Byers. And then several years later after Joyce and Hop eloped, she'd added a hyphen and Hopper so she'd have the same last name as Joyce. Now she was going to change everything and be a Wheeler.

Eleven Wheeler.

She leaned over and pecked Mike on the cheek, making him flush in embarrassment as the clerk smiled knowingly at the happy couple. Apparently handing out marriage licenses was her favorite part of her job even though the small county didn't require it too often.

"What was that for?" he whispered.

"For giving me another name," she bit her lip, looking almost shy, "I think it's my favorite."

He blushed even brighter and quickly gave the final signature, grabbing her hand and squeezing it as they left the office.

They spent the rest of the evening lazing around the house, just enjoying each other's company and watching the rerun of the X-Files episode he'd missed the night before. He'd easily found people to cover his shifts at RadioShack, his summer job, and El's boss, a rather sweet if not tough old lady, had given her the entire week off when she'd said she was getting married. It had been a while since they'd just hung out. No leftover work stress. No paper writing and researching. Just the two of them, a large pizza, and a half gallon of mint chip—Mike's favorite.

She was so wrapped in happiness she barely remembered to call Will, who eagerly agreed to be her best man, unfazed at her untraditional take on what a wedding party should be. He mentioned he was going to call in sick at the newly reopened Hawkins Lab where he worked as a bioengineer, trying to create a new artificial heart. When she told him Lucas and Dustin were coming he sounded even more excited, but unsurprised.

“Of course they’re coming back for you guys,” he’d sounded amused through the phone, “you’d do the same for any of us.”

He wasn’t wrong. She told him she loved him and hung up. It was getting late and El kept yawning so Mike dragged her to the bathroom, putting her toothbrush in her hand and then joining her at the sink. When they finally made it under the covers, he pulled her to him, wrapping his arm around her waist tightly, feeling extra snuggly. She didn’t complain, instead tucking herself further into the crook of his body like she was his missing puzzle piece, humming contently.

“You know, this is the only night you’re going to be my fiancée,” he murmured, his eyelids drooping. He was tired but wanted to hold onto this breath of peace as long as possible.

“S’nice,” she mumbled back before flipping over to face him and press another kiss to his lips, her eyelashes brushing his cheek.

““Night, Mike.”

““Night, El.”

The next morning it was raining, the late May air warm and muggy despite the clouds that filled the sky. They woke up to the sound of the doorbell and Mike grumpily left his sleepy fiancée to answer it. It was his mother, looking flustered.

“Um, hi, Mom.”

“Michael, it’s almost ten, don’t tell me you’re still sleeping?”

He blinked. “Well, I’m not *now* .”

“Where’s El? The ceremony is in four hours.”

She pushed past him into the house and he tried to blink the last bit of sleep out of his eyes as he followed her into the kitchen.

“She’s still in bed where I *should* be... why are *you* here so early? We have plenty of time...” He was still confused, reaching up to wipe away some eye crust and yawn.

“*Plenty* of time? What are you *talking* about? I scheduled her a hair appointment at eleven and the girl at the Estee Lauder counter is going to do her makeup after that, you two need to eat and *you* need to go get a tuxedo...”

He woke up pretty fast as she ranted, staring at her with wide eyes.

“Woah woah, wait. She said she was doing her own makeup and stuff... I was just going to wear my suit...” he only had one, a steely gray coat and slacks combo that he mostly wore for job interviews. Nobody had said anything about a tuxedo.

His mother was shaking her head at him, looking exasperated. She reached up and place a hand on her forehead.

“You can’t get married in that ratty thing, you need something proper,” she sniffed, “so you’ll look as good as your bride.” She reached over and tugged at his moppy black hair, still messy from bed, trying to push it out of his eyes. “Hmm, maybe you need a haircut too.”

“No, Mom, jeez, I just need to shower...” he was suddenly feeling very nervous, the warm glow from the day before gone as he tried to push his mom’s hand away.

“Mike?” El called from the bedroom.

She appeared in the doorway, eyes blinking the morning light, still wearing the old tank top and pair of his boxers she slept in. At the sight of Karen she crossed her arms self-consciously, shooting Mike a questioning look, her brows pulled together.

“Oh, um, good morning, Karen.”

"Hi, sweetie, I came to get you for your hair appointment and makeup, oh and maybe nails too... have you eaten?"

Karen whipped out a casserole dish that Mike somehow hadn't noticed and placed it on their tiny dining table. It was full of blueberry pancakes, scrambled eggs and hash browns, and despite his annoyance at his mother's overbearing presence, he felt his mouth watering. She still made the best breakfast.

"Come on, sit down," Karen said as she dug through their cupboards for plates and silverware and somehow the two ended up sitting at the table across from each other, digging into the delicious spread. "You've got a busy day ahead of you."

"Um, thanks, Mom," Mike said through a mouthful of syrup-covered eggs.

"Don't talk with your mouth full, Mike," she frowned before bending down to press a kiss to his forehead, like he was still the small twelve-year old sitting at her dinner table. She sighed heavily as he ducked away a bit. That hadn't changed.

"Alright," she clapped her hands as they finished wolfing down the delicious food, "El, you're coming with me first, then I'll come back for you, Mike..."

El frowned. "Where are we going?"

She was cautious. Karen had already bought her the beautiful dress, she couldn't possibly give them more. And El didn't really want to go, she wanted to stay with Mike.

"To get your hair and makeup done," Karen checked her watch again, "and your appointment is soon, so we need to leave. Oh, did you want your nails done too?"

"Um, I was... I was going to do my makeup and hair. I don't need anything—"

"Nonsense, El, you're a bride today. You should look like one."

"I have the dress that's—"

“—a good start, but I thought we could get your hair done up all pretty, and the Estee Lauder girl said she’d do your makeup and we can run to the nail salon—”

“ *Mom .* ”

Mike interrupted, frowning at his mother. El looked overwhelmed, her shoulders slumping down as she stared at her plate of half eaten eggs. She didn’t want to go, but it wasn’t a battle she wanted to fight with her soon-to-be mother-in-law and he could tell.

“I don’t think she wants to do all of that,” he gestured to her, “it’s not that big of a deal. We’re getting married at the *courthouse* , remember?”

“Well, yes, but that doesn’t mean you two can’t *look* like you’re getting married.”

“Why? It’s not like there’s anyone we need to impress? Besides, I told the guys to just wear like a tie and slacks, we’re not going to be that fancy—”

“The *guys* ? I assumed Will was coming... are Dustin and Lucas coming back?”

“Yeah, Lucas flew in at some god-forsaken early hour and Dustin drove in last night. They’re at their parents, they’re gonna meet us at the courthouse like fifteen minutes early. They’re my best men.”

“Best *men* ?”

“Yeah... they don’t know that yet though, they both think I’m going to pick the other. And Will is El’s best man.”

She looked uncomfortable. “No maid of honor?”

“Nope.” He smiled, a bit smug, at his mother’s confused expression. “Mom, I really appreciate you, but if you haven’t noticed this isn’t... we just want to get married. We don’t need anything else.”

There was a beat of silence and then his mother sat down in one of the chairs next to them, deflating a bit as she looked at the two

young adults in front of her. Mike had reached across the table and was holding El's hand, the one with the sparkling ring. They were staring at her with pleading eyes.

"I just... I want you to have the perfect day. Nancy never..." she trailed off with a sigh. Nancy had been to content to live with her two boys without any sort of label and while Karen had never said anything, she'd always been disappointed. She sighed again. "When I mentioned all this to Joyce she said I would do better to leave you be but... I've never been good at that, have I?"

"Um, not really..." Mike gave her a good-humored grin, "but it's not so bad... usually."

El spoke up, voice soft. "Thank you... for wanting to give me so much. But... I'm happy. The dress is beautiful."

Mike looked over at his mother curiously.

"You bought her a dress?" He swallowed. "How much was it?"

"None of your business. It was a gift." Karen rolled her eyes. What was with these kids and not wanting to accept gifts? "That's why I wanted you to get a tux... that suit jacket of yours is small, the sleeves are too short."

"How about I just don't wear the jacket then?"

"Mmm... that would be better," she agreed contemplatively. There was another beat and then she looked back over at El. "Well, we don't have to go and get your hair and makeup done, but the dress is at my place, so will you come and let me help you get ready there? Maybe we could grab some coffee and get our nails done... Joyce too, of course." It was a smaller gesture and El perked up at the mention of coffee.

"That would be nice," she smiled much more sincerely, "I just have to grab my makeup."

Mike pouted, looking between the two women, his fingers still tangled with El's.

“You’re going to leave me here? Alone?”

“Invite the guys over,” El suggested, eyes sparkling, “you can get ready together too.”

It was a good idea so he did, dialing up Lucas and Dustin’s home phone numbers which he still had memorized. Karen whisked El away again and Mike felt strangely empty without her presence in the tiny house, but soon enough his three friends arrived and distracted him from self-pity.

Dustin burst through the door, charging Mike and giving him a big bear hug, almost bouncing him in the air with excitement. Lucas came in after him, looking much cooler under a pair of silver aviator sunglasses, but with his signature cheshire grin.

“So you finally got the guts to ask her, huh?” he said, patting his friend’s shoulder appreciatively. “I wasn’t sure you had it in you, Mike.”

“Yeah, how did you ask? Were there fireworks and shit? Did you do that Star Wars thing you were thinking about?” Dustin chimed in.

“Um, no, I asked her the night before yesterday kind of on a whim... well, actually, I had the ring in my pocket and she asked me what was in my pocket and I couldn’t lie to her so...”

“You could have told her some riddles and made her guess,” Dustin grinned at his Hobbit reference, “ya know, like Bilbo and Gollum.”

Mike rolled his eyes but snorted a laugh. “Yeah, see, I actually like her, so I didn’t think I needed to hide it from her.”

“Did she cry? Did she scream? Did she make shit float with her mind?”

“No, Dustin, she has better control than that,” he bit his lip, not wanting to tell them that she’d initially freaked out, deciding to gloss over the less romantic bits, “but yeah, uh, she definitely cried.” That wasn’t a lie.

The door opened again and this time Will came in, dressed in black

slacks, a white dress shirt and a grey vest. He looked at the others in their casual clothes uncertainly.

“Are we not dressing up for this? You said on the phone casual dress wear...”

“No, you’re right, Will, we just haven’t changed yet.”

“Yeah, Mike hasn’t told us who’s best man so we don’t know who’s dressing up,” Lucas said from his place on the couch.

“Oh, I’m best man,” Will said casually, giving Mike a smirk.

Dustin and Lucas looked at him and blinked, then looked at Mike expectantly for an explanation about this apparent betrayal. He put his hands up defensively and laughed.

“Woah, easy. He’s El’s best man, not mine.”

Dustin frowned. “El has a best man?”

“Well, who would be her maid of honor?” Lucas, the more analytical one, figured out. “It makes more sense, honestly.”

They both stared at Mike, trying to clue him in that it was time for him to announce his choice and he rolled his eyes. Some things never changed.

“Okay, don’t hate me for this because it was kind of El’s idea, but... I was hoping you would both be my best man. Best men,” he shrugged, “I know it’s not logical but... I’d really like it if you were both there with me.”

Dustin blinked and then started laughing, clearly remembering a time when he’d heard a similar remark ten years ago. Lucas looked bemused, but then shrugged and nodded.

“Yeah, okay,” he agreed, looking pleased but trying to hide it.

“You and your weird illogical bullshit,” Dustin said, his lisp as present as ever. “But yeah, why not. The more the merrier, right?”

Mike turned on the coffee pot and they spent the next hour catching up on everything.

Lucas worked down at NASA in Florida, soaking up the sun on his days off and calculating launches and astrophysics in between. He looked tired, the late night flight and drive taking it's toll, but his smirk never left his face.

Dustin was in Indianapolis, working at an uprising computer tech company, leading a boy scout troop in his spare time with his trusty, ever-present compass. They visited several times a year and came home for holidays, but the distance always took its toll and sometimes Mike missed riding his bike over to the Byers and playing D&D on the living room floor with them while El fell asleep on his shoulder.

After college they'd all had to go their separate ways, but right now it felt just like old times again and an hour and a half quickly slipped by. Mike happened to glance at the microwave clock and nearly jumped out of his seat when he realized it was nearly one. He needed to pick up the marriage license at one thirty before the ceremony at two. And they still needed to actually get dressed.

"Guys, I need to change and so do you, um," he looked down at his ratty pajamas and their jeans, "and then I have to run to the clerk's office, did you want to meet at the courthouse at one forty-five like we planned?"

The irrational nervousness he'd been pushing away all morning was starting to set in and he realized he didn't really want them to leave. He didn't want to be alone. Will, ever the quiet observer, noticed and shifted in his chair.

"I can hang out here until you're ready, if you want. Since I'm already dressed and these two slowpokes still have to go back home."

Mike shot him a grateful look. "Yeah, that'd be great, um, if you don't mind."

Dustin and Lucas headed back to their parents' places and Will ran to the bathroom and then it was just Mike, staring into the tiny closet

he shared with El. *Should I wear a tie?* He sorted through his small selection of silky neckwear. There were three or four fancy-patterned ones, striped or dotted or paisley-print, and then a tacky holiday one with a reindeer on it that the students he subbed for always liked because it lit up and played Christmas music. That had been a gift from Steve. Then there were the six different, well-worn Star Wars ties, all brought to him by El.

She loved buying him nerdy ties, finding them in gift shops or mall kiosks. He always protested that she should spend her money on something for herself, but at the same time they were his favorites and always got the kids at school excited. He smiled to himself as he ran his fingers over the smooth spacescape covered in dueling tie-fighters and x-wings.

“Are you going to wear a Star Wars tie?”

Will’s voice surprised him and he looked over at the doorway to the small bedroom, where his friend was leaning.

“Um, I was thinking about it, but my mom would hate it...” he swallowed, “and apparently she bought El a wedding dress so I guess I should try and look nice.”

“It’s just a tie...” Will came over to the closet to look at them, “and this one is mostly black. That’s kinda fancy.”

“It has the Death Star on it.”

“Just pretend it’s the moon.”

Will was grinning and Mike found himself shaking his head at the joke. He nodded slowly, looking thoughtful.

“Actually, she’d probably believe me...”

He found himself reaching for the tie, setting it on top of the baby blue dress shirt and gray suit pants that were already on laying out on the bed. It actually looked pretty good together and he wondered for the thousandth time that day what exactly El was going to be wearing. He hoped his mom hadn’t pressured her into anything she didn’t want, but at the same time El was pretty good at standing up

for herself when she wanted to, and Joyce had been there too. *Is she really going to be all dressed up in a white wedding dress?* The thought made his palms sweat. It made what was about to happen so much more real.

“You okay, Mike?” Will was still standing in the door but he came in and set his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Yeah, I’m great, I’m getting married.” He paled a bit and licked his lips. “Will, I’m getting *married*. ”

“To El,” Will reminded him, “and you love her...” he gave him a look, “right?”

“Of *course* I do.” That wasn’t the issue. “I just... what if I can’t take care of her? What if I do something wrong or lose my job or... hurt her on accident. I mean, I’m about to swear in front of all these people I care about to love her and take care of her forever and what if... what if I *can’t* ?”

Mike flopped onto the bed, one hand worryingly pulling at his hair. This was a different fear and he wasn’t sure where it was even coming from. Will sat down next to him, looking serious.

“So what if you can’t?” he asked.

“What?”

“What if you can’t? What if you both lose your jobs and end up homeless or she gets hurt somehow and you can’t be there?” Mike was gaping at him, like just thinking about it was upsetting. “Are you going to stop loving her if something like that happens?”

Mike’s mouth snapped shut. “No, of course not.”

“And are you going to try and keep bad things like that from happening? As much as you can?”

“Well, yeah...”

“Okay, well, then that’s all you have to do. You’ve always tried your hardest to keep your promises,” Will smiled warmly, “I don’t see how

this one is going to be any different.”

It was exactly what the taller, sweating young man needed to hear. And it was the honest truth. Mike *always* kept his promises, and thinking about it as that and less of a big, prestigious ceremony helped to calm the churning nervousness that swirled in his gut. He let out a long breath.

“Okay. Yeah. I can do that,” he agreed.

“I know you can,” Will shrugged and then stood up, leaving the room and ending the conversation.

It didn’t take long for Mike to change, and while he didn’t look as nervous as before, he was still sweating profusely, the humid air making his long, dark bangs stick to his forehead. Lucas and Dustin reappeared in dress clothes and they headed to the courthouse so Mike could pick up the license. His mom’s car was nowhere to be seen, but Hop’s beige police Blazer was in the parking lot and the chief was sitting in the hallway outside of the justice of the peace’s office. Joyce was with El and Karen at the Wheeler’s still. The four boys joined the older man on the wooden bench, Mike’s leg jiggling up and down as he glanced towards the door every few seconds. It was almost one forty-five.

“They’ll probably be late, kid,” Hop’s voice startled him out of his nervous reverie. “Those two women were like vultures the second she got in the house. They almost chased me out when I told them it was time to leave.”

Mike perked up. “You saw El?”

“Sure did,” Hop grinned his crooked smile, “you’re a lucky man, Wheeler.”

“I know...” Mike was struck by a thought and sat up straighter, turning to face the older man. “Hey, Chief? Can I, um, I was thinking just now—Well I mean, um—”

“For Christ’s sake, kid, spit it out.”

Mike turned red and tugged at the collar of his shirt, nerves spiking

in his stomach like tiny needles of ice. He swallowed and opened his mouth.

“C-Could I have your blessing?” He managed to spit out. Hop’s eyes widened and he blustered on, “I-I know it’s kind of last minute, but, uh, well, it would be kind of nice even though we aren’t really doing anything else traditional—”

“I’m not her dad.” Hop sounded almost strained and Mike blinked.

“Well, um, not officially or anything but... you’re the closest thing she’s ever had to one.”

That was undeniable. He’d never officially adopted her, she’d only changed her name to match Joyce’s. She hadn’t really wanted a dad, the ghost of Brenner haunting her too much to ever want another Papa. He’d always just been “Hop” or “Chief” and he’d been content to be so. They shared ice cream and watched crime shows on the Byers couch, he’d picked her up from school and hung out with her and Will when Joyce had late nights and Jonathan was gone, and he’d always been there to hand out advice if she asked. But she wasn’t his daughter and he knew it. At the same time there was a strange warm feeling in his gut at Mike’s words. He wasn’t sure if he liked it.

“Alright sure, you’re... blessed or whatever,” he said gruffly, that crooked grin still quirking his lips. He let out a heavy breath and gave Mike a serious look. “You take good care of her, son. Like you always have.”

Mike gulped. “Yes, sir.”

The doors at the front opened and Karen walked in, alone, a broad smile on her face. She almost ran to her son and Mike stood up, his mouth open with the question. His mother didn’t bother letting him ask it.

“She’s coming, turn around!” It was an order which she punctuated by grabbing his shoulders and manually rotating him the other direction. He let out a noise of disapproval but didn’t fight it, knowing better. He tried to glance over his shoulder and her hand

snapped his head back around. "Let it be a surprise, Michael!"

The guys stood up too, and Mike heard the door open behind him, the sound of Joyce calling a greeting and two sets of footsteps. His three friends broke out into simultaneous grins and Hop almost looked like he was going to cry. He strained a bit against his mother's arms as Dustin let out a long, impressed whistle.

"You look great, El," he said.

Lucas nodded in agreement and grinned cheekily, "Pretty good for a weirdo."

Hopper was speechless and Will just smiled, not needing to say the words he was sure his sister already knew.

"Thank you."

The sound of her soft voice shot a bolt of excitement through Mike and he resisted the urge to knock his mother over so he could turn around already. Then his mom's hands were gone, replaced by smaller ones that were much more gentle. He spun on his heel, almost falling over his feet. At the sight of his bride felt the breath leave his lungs.

She was smiling up at him, mascara-widened eyes dancing, and the reflection from the afternoon sun lit her up from behind, almost making her seem as if she was made of light. The soft blush pink dress made her glow, bringing out the soft tones in her cheeks and lips, which were accented by the barest whisper of makeup. Her hair still brushed her shoulders but had been done half-up, the honey-brown strands twisting around her head like a soft crown and woven with tiny, white baby's breath. The dress wasn't anything like he expected, the off-shoulder sleeves accenting her defined collarbones, the soft fabric swishing around her knees. She was wearing her battered pair of pink Chucks and he almost laughed.

It was perfect. *She* was perfect.

He didn't know what his face looked like, but she started laughing and gently reached out, one hand resting on his arm, the other gently

pushing his gaping mouth shut. He tried to find words, desperately grasping for something that could define how he was feeling.

“W-Wow,” he croaked. He swallowed dryly and tried again. “I mean, the dress and your *hair* and just... wow you look so...”

“Pretty?” she supplied, still smiling.

It was a flashback to one of the first moments they’d ever shared. One of the first ones where he’d realized that he wanted her to be in his future. Her pink dress back then hadn’t been quite as stunning and her eyes had been shadowed with insecurity. Now she glowed, the twelve years of warm smiles and tender words since then making up for the first twelve years of cold tile and sterile silences. He marveled at her change from a small, scared child to the dazzlingly beautiful young woman before him now, proud of how far she’d come. And in all that time she’d still chosen to love him, to stay with him.

A surge of warmth erupted in his chest and he reached for her, snagging her by the waist and pulling her to him. He lifted her up and she seemed to understand what he was doing, resting her hands on his shoulders as he spun, her laughter filling the air. Her skirt swirled around her legs as she looked down at the boy, no, the man who made her so happy. Who’d always been there during the dark nights when the night terrors crept in, who chased away the fear and insecurity and made her feel more safe than she ever thought she could be.

They spun for a few more seconds and then Mike had to put her down after he almost tripped over his clunky dress shoes. She was still giggling softly, holding onto him to keep herself from falling over. He leaned down, head still fuzzy, and kissed her, telling her without words just how much he loved her. She kissed back without hesitation, answering his kiss with one equally full of love.

“Hey, save it for the actual ceremony!” Hop interrupted gruffly and they broke apart, looking sheepish. “I’m pretty sure you’re supposed to say ‘I do’ before you kiss?”

“Oh, leave them be,” Joyce walked over to her husband and tucked herself under his arm, “I think I remember you being a little

overeager too?”

“Hmm... maybe I do remember that...”

The older couple shared a chaste kiss and Will and El looked at each other and rolled their eyes. Parents.

The door to the judge’s office opened and the older man blinked at the small crowd in front of him. His eyes focused in on Mike and El and he gave them a warm smile.

“You must be the Wheeler-Byers party. Come in.”

The parents and friends headed in first and Mike reached over, grabbing El’s hand and giving it a gentle squeeze. She looked up at him and he felt his heart speed up, but then she bit her lip and he was struck by the thought that she might be just as nervous as he was.

“Scared?”

She nodded and he felt his heart pang with worry, but then she smiled again.

“Good scared.”

“Me too,” he admitted.

He took one more look at her, breathing in her familiar features and comforting scent.

“Ready?”

She took his hand in both of hers and pulled him towards the doorway, eyes dancing again. He followed without hesitating, stepping towards their future with a smile.

“Always.”

Notes for the Chapter:

god please, duffer bothers please, shawn levy

pLEASE LET THIS PRECIOUS KIDS BE HAPPY OKAY
I KNOW IT'S A HORROR SHOW BUT I NEED THEM
TO BE HAPPY.

anyways my feelings aside, i know this story is a
little clunky and over-romanticized, but i kind of
wanted it to be honestly. i just love them so much.

thanks for the sweet words. i hope you liked it.

-g